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AUTHOR Howard, Roy E.
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ABSTRACT

The Navajo tribe adopted a policy in 1985 that encourages all schools with Navajo students to teach Navajo language and culture in addition to the regular curriculum. A review of the recent studies and literature reveals that most support the concept of bilingual/bicultural education in one form or another. The consensus seems to be that teacher's methods are most effective when the teacher is sensitive to the cultural perspective of the student. Although bilingual/bicultural teaching strategies may be desirable, their widespread use on the reservation may yet take a few more years. The obstacles include: (1) insufficient number of bilingual teachers; (2) lack of training in bilingual methods; (3) uneven support from teachers, administration, and communities; (4) unreliable federal support; and (5) lack of materials and materials development centers. Discussions with staff members and parents at Dzlith Na O Dith Hle Community School (DCS) reveal a wide range of attitudes towards bilingual education. Approaches that may be viable at DCS include: (1) form a Navajo club with volunteer students and staff pioneering methods and materials; (2) hire a resource teacher; (3) seek Title VII funding to train and pay bilingual aides; (4) encourage teachers and aides to develop bilingual/cultural resources. (JHZ)

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TEACHING NAVAJO LANGUAGE AND CULTURE AT DZILTH NA O DITH HLE COMMUNITY SCHOOL

a history, analysis and recommendation

by

ROY E. HOWARD
Lubbock, Texas
April 1985

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I
INTRODUCTION

John Collier, the head of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) from 1933-1944 advocated bilingual and bicultural education for the various Native American tribes. Robert Young, the Albuquerque Area Tibal Operations Officer for the BIA in 1967, eloquently pled the cause of special linguistic and methods training for biculturally oriented teachers as a necessity for the Navajo schools (Young, 1968). Professor Bernard Spolsky, writing for the BIA in 1973, said that "bilingual education has become a pressing need for Navajo schools; without it, Navajo students are doomed to an inferior education." William Kniseley of the Borrego Pass School, BIA, clearly explained the need for the Navajo pupil to learn to read their own language before learning to read English, and how to carry out the program (Kniseley, 1983). The 1975 Lau Remedies Act and Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) mandate special programs for language minority children when 20 or more students of the same primary language group are identified in a school

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district. The Indian Self-determination Act, P.L. 93-638 and the Basic Indian Education Act, P.L. 95-561 also encourage bicultural Indian education.

Why then, did the Secretary of Education report to the president in 1982 that 89% of the BIA schools in the nation did not have any instruction in the tribal language for major subjects and 86% did not even have any language programs consisting of transitional or English as a second language (ESL) programs or tribal language arts instruction? Are unsympathetic administrators preventing implementation of these mandated programs, is it more due to technical difficulties, or is the bilingual approach even a valid strategy for schools such as those on the Navajo Reservation?

A study of the history of Indian education in this country is the first step in understanding the current attitudes of parents and educators toward this issue. A review of the research and a view of the schools who have tried the approach will be needed before we can make a fair judgement.

II

HISTORY OF INDIAN EDUCATION

Thomas Jefferson, in a message to Congress while serving as president stated, "in truth, the ultimate point of rest and happiness for the Indians is to let our settlements and theirs meet and blend together, to intermix

and become one people. Incorporating themselves with us as citizens of the United States is what the natural process of things will bring on; it is better to promote than retard it. It is better for them to be identified with us and preserved in the occupation of their lands than to be exposed to the dangers of being a seperate people." This blending of peoples of the Old and New Worlds may have occurred in many South American countries, but not here. President Jefferson's philosophy did not result in equal status and education for the tribes. The only education that was carried to the Indians by the conquering people was done by the missionaries of various denominations. They taught using a mixture of the native tongue and English. Their purpose was to change the people's religion, but they did not try to change other aspects of their lives.

Congress assumed the forceful stance of assimilate or exterminate with the land reduction act of 1887, and by seperating children from their families into rigid, English-only boarding schools beginning in 1870. Government policy toward Indian education remained the same into the 20th century. Theodore Roosevelt, president from 1901-1908 said, "we have room for but one language here, and that is the English language, for we intend to see that the crucible turns our people out as Americans, and not as dwellers in a polyglot boarding house." However, efforts to force the dominant culture language upon the Indians did not work.

They returned to their ways as soon as they could escape from the schools.

With the Merriam Report to Congress in 1928, a new approach began. More humane and standard methods of academic instruction were encouraged. They might have even had good results, but for one important factor; the system provided no place for the graduate to use his new skills. No jobs were available to the Indian, no matter what his education. With no hope for economic or social betterment as a result of his efforts, the motivation for study was gone.

A new era briefly existed from the beginning of Comissioner John Collier's term with the BIA until WWII brought the nation's attention to other matters. Willard Beatty and his associates designed ESL and bilingual materials based on the sciences of anthropology, sociology, psychology and linguistics. Teachers were trained in new methods, including insight into Indian cultures and languages. The materials produced and the experience gained proved valuable 20 years later when the effort began to be renewed to meet the special educational problems posed by cultural-linguistic minorities.

The government attempted to get out of the Indian education business from 1945 to 1959. During this time, local boarding schools were closed and students were moved to far away states or transported to nearby towns. Public schools suddenly assumed responsibility for a population

they did not have the special materials and training to serve. Tribes ended up worse culturally and economically than before. Public schools and universities began to make efforts to meet the challenge. New materials for teaching English as a second language for the Indians began to inspire efforts to serve the needs of other language minority populations in the United States and other countries.

The greatest gains in quality of education began soon afterwards. The 1964 Economic Opportunity Act prescribed that ESL methods be used and that Indian schools should transmit Indian Culture. Funding for ESL and bilingual programs with bilingual classroom instructional aides, preschool classes, accompanied by increased parental involvement, began to result in increased attendance and greater gains. Yet by 1971, with 50,000 Navajo children in school, 98% of them being Navajo speakers, with only 12% beginning school knowing English, only 100 out of 2,200 teachers were Navajo speakers. In a review done in 1973, the BIA estimated that 40% of their teachers left after only one year of teaching. The need for better teacher preparation was obvious. The student drop-out rate averaged 50% with some schools up to 100%. The 12% who entered college, dropped out at a 95% rate. The reservations suffered from 39% unemployment, and had 12.2 times the alcohol related arrests as the national average for teenagers, with children as young as eight years involved.

The 36,000 students in boarding schools, estranged from their families, were in a difficult environment. By 1972, only 12 of 200 BIA schools in one study had converted to Indian local control. Boarding school attendance continued to rise in spite of it all.

III

ATTITUDES TOWARD BILINGUAL AND BICULTURAL EDUCATION

Students undergo various types of stress as they try to adapt to the estrangement from family in the dormitory, the new language in the classroom and the efforts of the teachers to change their way of thinking about many things. One study (Bowd, 1972) showed that the principle reason for language problems in school was inadequate exposure to English, rather than use of the native language. Evans and Abbey (1977) emphasized the lack of an experience base to comprehend concepts introduced in the standard texts. Language is experience and culture based. Conflicting with the culture context they were raised in, the texts present a confusing outlook on life. Leon-Portilla (1975) says that these students are "caught in the middle" between one cultural identity and another. The new experience threatens their language, traditions, beliefs, symbols, value systems, sense of origin and destiny and their basic moral values and world view. Many writers suggest that instruction that is bilingually and biculturally oriented is the solution to the students'

dilemma, but what do the educators and parents feel about it?

The report to the President given by Secretary Bell in 1982 showed that schools varied in their acceptance of the principle according to their exposure to it. Most public schools with experience in Title VII bilingual projects were satisfied that they were helpful. All the schools without experience in bilingual/bicultural programs saw no need for them. They felt that the Indian students did fine in English only instruction. They felt that cultural awareness and pride could be adequately developed by localized social studies and curriculum projects. Schools under the control of a tribe or tribal school board had greater interest in bilingual education and felt a need for it, especially the more isolated schools. For the most part, the BIA schools did not understand the concept of bilingual education. They equated it with the concept of teaching a little Indian history or crafts. There is no question but that teachers accustomed to a particular way of teaching are not likely to favor retraining into culturally oriented methods. This was verified in a study by Swisher (1984). Acceptance of multicultural education was more likely among those exposed to other cultures. The highest acceptance was among the younger teachers trained in multicultural methods in college. The least acceptance was among the older teachers not so trained. Among the parents, the greatest acceptance was among those who had lived off the reservation for 10

years or more and the least, among the parents who had always lived on the reservation.

Many Indian parents are wary of bicultural methods, whether administered by the Indians or non-Indians. So many changes have occurred. So many hands are in the pie. For example, seven different types of systems administer education on the Navajo Reservation alone: tribe, contract schools, BIA, the various public school districts of Arizona, Utah and New Mexico, and various religious organizations. No coordination of studies is done among these groups. Parents are torn by conflicting values. They are trying to believe that education is the ladder to success. They try to trust the teachers with the mysterious process of the white man's education and are confused when, in recent years, the teacher asks for their contribution to the process. They have hope that the whole experience will somehow help their children have a better life than what they have had, by teaching them to compete in the white man's world. They have a hard time seeing how the study of the native language will help that process.

Hearings by the Navajo Division of Education in 1975 showed the opposite side of their concerns. The parents surveyed saw formal education as an institution which disrupted the existing lifestyles. They saw their children being alienated by the impersonal and insensitive curriculum content. The system seemed to negate the traditional value system and impair the total development of the child. As a

result, the Navajo children received very little reinforcement of their traditional values and knowledge and acquired only insufficient understanding of the Anglo culture. Consequently, they are uncomfortable in both the Navajo and the Anglo worlds. "Navajos want this changed: they want to see a reflection of their evolving society in their educational system." The key to this seemingly contradictory attitude of parents is simple. Cultural pluralism is desirable, but only if it is equitable. The program must teach the children to compete in the non-Indian world (Gray 1976). Some tribes are concerned enough with the importance of knowing their own culture, that they are following the lead of Israel; attempting to revive a language that has long since not been spoken (St. Clair and Bassett, 1979).

IV

PRO AND CON

Many people simply do not believe that our schools should be teaching anything other than the English language. Some studies have shown that one bilingual or ESL program and another failed to produce greater gains than standard programs (Cooley, Vanosdol and Johnson, 1976). Counter critics maintain that we should not judge a philosophy based on a few failures. They admit that a program that is short-lived, intermittent or voluntary in participation may indeed have little effect in changing concepts that have

been developed over a long period of time (Taylor,1973). One argument against such programs is derived from the fact that each implementation is very different according to the philosopy of the people involved. Epstein (1977) says he would support a system if the policy were to "sustain and build valuable national language resources, opening other worlds to all." However, he believes that a school should not run a program designed to perpetuate a language or culture. That is the responsibility of the family, church or community.

The Rough Rock experience (Bayne, 1969) demonstrates the importance of accurately defined, realistic goals. We cannot expect to preserve the cultures and values of an Indian society through our school system, for two reasons. First, it is the form of the education, not the content that perpetuates the values of a culture. No matter what the content, the Anglo purpose and style is to rush the children to achieve skills and attitudes required by the pressures of getting a job and becoming succesful in a competitive society; instead of the slow paced, child initiated learning style in which the objective is to become a good man or woman and is involved with every interaction within the community. Second, the source of a child's identity is derived from living in the community and participating in the clan relationships. The school curriculum that gives a superficial introduction to myths, legends, arts, crafts and language is only giving lip service to the colorful,

external factors of a culture. These may be good things to do in that they bring the school and the community together and foster mutual respect between the teacher and the student, but they do not and should not be expected to preserve culture or language. Bayne asserts that the central purpose of the school must be the perpetuation of the culture of modern, technological America.

Studies throughout the world have shown that true bilingualism is not attained by school study. The phenomenon of diglossic differentiation is more often observed. That is, each language is used in particular, socially distinct contexts. In Paraguay, the Guarani use their language in informal and intimate contexts and use Spanish in formal contexts (Oller, 1975). In Arizona, the Yaqui use their language in familial, informal and formal ceremonial situations and use Spanish in familial, informal and formal Catholic situations and use English in formal, educational, economic and legal instances (Barber, 1973). Cohen (1974) on the other hand, did observe Mexican students in California trained bilingually using both English and Spanish equally both in school and in social situations. Choice of language depended on whom they were with. Bartelt (1978) asserts that bilingual education does not result in better English acquisition, but better self image. "Bilingual education fosters acculturation as much as monolingual education, but does it more humanely."

Troike (1980) quotes the results of 12 studies of bilingual programs throughout the nation. The conclusion is reached that a quality bilingual education program can be effective in meeting the goals of equal educational opportunity for minority language children. The National Advisory Council for Bilingual Education (1980-81) is convinced that the overwhelming impirical evidence shows that bilingual education programs are indeed effective in teaching English to children with limited English proficiency (LEP) while teaching them basic skills and helping them to retain their first language.

The question seems to be more, to what extent is the school and the community prepared to get involved in multicultural activites. The concept of bicultural education may well be valid for the BIA schools, but which model? There is a wide range of teaching style difference between ESL (English only) and maintenance (both languages equal). Is it important to teach the Navajo language to all the students, or is it even harmful? Is it possible to acquire and train qualified bilingual teachers in sufficient numbers? Will the political climate, nationally and locally, remain conducive to such an effort long enough for it to achieve minimum bilingual staffing?

V

BICULTURAL INDIAN EDUCATION IN ACTION

Numerous examples of schools attempting various styles of bicultural education are mentioned in the literature. Conn (1973) describes a bicultural/bilingual course at Ramah High School in which students learn what is expected of them within the legal and traditional confines of two societies regarding law and family, community, consumer roles, etc. New (1974), describes the success of the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe in helping the students, age 15-22, discover who they are and what it is they can contribute to the world and to develop the self-respect and self-confidence necessary to make it in the competitive world. They do not teach Indian languages, or any one culture, but emphasize special electives in various Indian arts for 350 students from 88 tribes. Rossier and Holm (1980) report that Rock Point students who received bilingual instruction over a 6 year period scored higher on standardized achievement tests than Navajo students at comparable schools who had received English language only, ESL, or EFL (English as a foreign language) instruction. They also point to the Soviet experience: the Czars attempted, unsuccesfully, to introduce Russian throughout the Soviet Union. However, after the revolution, bilingual methods resulted in widespread bilingualism. In some areas where they have since dropped the bilingual approach for a

direct Russian language method, the dropout and failure rates have dramatically increased.

Teacher cultural awareness and special linguistic methods training continues to be an important issue. In 1968, the Navajo area Office of the BIA introduced an ESL methods training program. With funding from Title I and support of Colorado State University, a Masters degree program was offered. Courses were held at local agency headquarters for the convenience of the participants. By the first year of the program, 400 teachers had taken two courses and felt that they were doing better in class (Harvey, 1969). The All Pueblo Council On-site Teacher Education Program for the past year provided funding for 156 of the 201 Pueblo teacher education students. The leaders expect that having Pueblo teachers instructing Pueblo students will produce teachers more in tune with the expectations of the community and better language and cultural dynamics with the students. Spolsky (1975), describes how the "Navajo Reading Study Program" established a goal of training 1000 Navajo teachers for the early grades. On-site college courses were arranged and plans made for developing appropriate culture based curricula and high quality reading books in the Navajo language. Since that time, many other similar programs have trained hundreds of Indian instructional aides and teachers and placed them in their community schools. Whether or to what extent bilingual methods may be used, we are at least seeing a

trend toward more community and Indian control, from the school board to the classroom.

VI

CONCLUSION

The majority of the literature seems to support the concept of bilingual or bicultural education in one form or another. Several obstacles seem to be in the way of implementing such plans on a wide scale in the near future:

1. there is a small percentage of bilingual teachers
2. lack of training in bilingual methods
3. uneven support from teachers, administration, and communities
4. unreliable federal support
5. lack of materials and materials development centers

The consensus seems to be that teachers' methods are most effective when the teacher is sensitive to the cultural perspective of the student. Although bilingual and bicultural teaching strategies may be desirable, their widespread use on the reservation may yet take a few more years.

VII

RECENT DEVELOPEMENTS AFFECTING DCS

The Navajo tribe adopted a policy in 1985 that encourages all schools with Navajo students to teach Navajo

language skills and Navajo culture topics in addition to the regular curriculum. The Eastern Navajo agency has adopted this as official policy with no implementation date. All schools are to submit their plan for implementation. It is expected that each will have a different idea of how and when. The agency is sponsoring workshops to orient committees of teachers and aides in ways to start.

Discussions with staff members at DCS reveal varying attitudes toward bilingual methods or curriculum. Some see it as another passing fad in a continuing wide variety of short term, ill fated special programs. After all, the tribe and the BIA not too long ago had a strict policy of having such things taught in the home only, never at school. Some feel that only the Navajo teachers would be qualified to teach Navajo language and culture. Some Navajo teachers know that they have not been trained to do that. Some teachers (of both cultures) do not agree with the tribe's policy; "school is for teaching English". This school has attitudes representing all of those discussed above. The parents likewise, represent a variety of views. Indeed, many of the local parents who might be sympathetic to Navajo language training in the schools, have already transferred their children to schools such as Berean Mission where it has long been given, or Bloomfield, where many of the lower grade teachers are implementing bilingual methods with the help of Title VII funds.

The approaches that may be viable at this school include:

-start a Navajo club. Volunteer students and staff will pioneer methods and materials that can be eventually implemented school-wide.

-start with K and/or 1st grade. Add methods and materials each year to accomodate the upcoming bilingual group.

-hire a resource teacher (under Title VII) to teach special classes in Navajo reading and writing and develop a broader curriculum for the classrooms and train the teachers. Such a plan may be written to be phased out in a few years.

-encourage the classroom teachers to gradually develop and use bilingual resources that suit their style. Encourage aides and teachers to take courses or inservice in Navajo language literacy.

-seek Title VII funding to train and pay for part of the aides salary. The aides could be funded partly Title I also. Part of their day could be spent in tutoring or teaching Navajo language or culture concepts.

Many staff members at DCS have been trained in bilingual methods or in the Navajo language. The fact that a teacher is bilingual does not connotate that he is

qualified to use bilingual teaching methods. Most states have bilingual certification procedures (usually for Spanish). That does not mean that Spanish speakers are so certified. Even native speakers are required to take many courses to train them in the methods. There are many methods of implementing bilingual programs. This school should gradually develop a method based on experimentation and experience that is feasible and desirable; that aids the student's growth toward achieving the basic objectives set by the school board.

The study of various languages can help students in understanding and using English better. The logical first choice of a language at this school is Navajo. Students who can read, write and think in two languages will likely find it easier to learn a third or a fourth. Their academic progress will be improved, not hindered. This people is loosing the ability to speak educatedly and well in their native tongue, because they simply have no call to. The new policy of the agency will result in a generation of Navajos who are better prepared than any before to meet the challenges of growing up and assuming leadership in the world.

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